

By Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23)

As I travel across our district, I am reminded that for many of you, one thing remains most important: the state of our economy. People are doing more with less and are understandably frustrated. I hear that from the rancher and the teacher. And I hear it from the small business owner who is struggling to stay afloat.

Government doesn't have all the answers, but sometimes it can help spur investment and get the economy rolling again. I would ask the constituents of the 23rd Congressional District to keep two things in mind. First, the economy didn't tank overnight and second, things are

improving. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as the Stimulus, is injecting new life into our economy and our district is seeing the benefits of that. We are bolstering our energy industries, investing in small businesses and key sectors like teaching and law enforcement, and putting people back to work building and maintaining roads, bridges and other crucial infrastructure.

So far, more than \$17 billion in stimulus money has come to Texas, despite the objections of many. News reports indicate that even opponents of the bill have seen the value that Stimulus dollars can bring to their districts. According to the Dallas Morning News, every Texas lawmaker regardless of party affiliation has sought stimulus funds during the past year for projects like police funding, transportation projects and tax credits for a semiconductor plant in North Texas that is expected to create 1,000 jobs.

Why are opponents of the Recovery Act asking for money from the very bill they sought to defeat? The answer is simple: The Stimulus works.

This is backed up by research. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a report indicating that a little more than 30 percent of Recovery funds for programs administered by states and localities had been paid out by the federal government. Much of that funding went to transportation programs and educational institutions which will in turn require the hiring of new workers.

Another report, by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, found that the stimulus had added up to 2.1 million people to employment rolls by the end of 2009 and added between 1.5 and 3.5 percentage points to the economy last year. Remember, the Stimulus was designated for “shovel-ready” projects that would put people to work immediately. We have started the process of getting our economy back on track and putting Americans back to work.

And the Commerce Department recently reported economic growth of 5.9 percent for the fourth quarter of 2009 – slightly higher than an earlier prediction. It’s the strongest quarterly growth we’ve seen in more than six years and is a clear indication that things are turning around for the U.S. economy.

Our district alone has benefitted tremendously from millions in Stimulus dollars for everything from border law enforcement efforts and school districts to road improvements and water and sewer line construction throughout our twenty counties. The Stimulus has even extended the Earned Income Tax Credit for needy families as tax season looms, allowing eligible families to keep more of their hard-earned dollars.

In fact, a full third of Stimulus dollars went for tax cuts, such as the Making Work Pay tax credit for 2009 and 2010, which will result in a credit of up to \$400 for eligible individuals and \$800 for couples filing jointly.

And all of this has been done with an unprecedented amount of transparency. Every dollar, every job, every contractor can be tracked by the public at www.recovery.gov.

But numbers don’t really tell the story.

In February, I met three teachers at the Presidio Independent School District who have teaching jobs as a result of the Stimulus. They are providing educational opportunities to children in one of the poorest regions of our district. Third-grade teacher Adriana Galindo is one of those teachers. She said the Stimulus funding has allowed the district to provide jobs that didn’t exist before.

“Intervention in our children's studies is probably one of the most important things that needs to happen,” Galindo said. “Without this position I would not have been able to help the children who need the help.

The Stimulus is helping those children learn the information and skills they need to survive in our complex and competitive world. That's what I call recovery in action.

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